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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN WOMEN'S GROUPS PRESENT 100-DAY PLAN

REF: GUATEMALA 313

¶1. (U) Summary: Women's groups congregated in front of the National Palace, Congress, and the Supreme Court on March 5 to present to the government a 100-day plan for women. First Lady Sandra Torres de Colom pledged her support to advance their agenda and promised to deliver the plan to President Colom. End Summary.

The 100-Day Plan

¶2. (U) On March 5, women's groups delivered to the GOG a 100-day plan for women in commemoration of International Women's Day (March 8). Among its 19 demands, the groups called upon the Executive to revise the national policy on women in consultation with women's organizations, define the communication and coordination strategy of the Presidential Secretariat for Women (SEPREM), guarantee transparency in the

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election of the Secretariat, incorporate the principle of equality as a cornerstone of its policies, promote the participation of women in rural development councils, and develop a program to give women better access to housing, subsidies, and micro-credit. They also urged the executive, legislative, and judicial branches to coordinate actions to prevent domestic violence and femicide.

¶3. (U) First Lady Sandra Torres de Colom, who received the plan and promised to deliver it to President Colom, assured them that the Executive is open to dialogue and will consult women's organizations on actions affecting them. She noted that many of the actions requested were actions already contemplated by the Executive. She pledged to establish a mechanism of dialogue and coordination, and to convene a meeting each month with representatives of women's groups, with the aim of evaluating progress on the plan. She also committed to creating the "Coalition of First Ladies and Women Leaders of Latin America on Women and AIDS," and announced that the Secretariat of Social Work of the Office of the First Lady will establish a program to monitor actions of the Ministry of Health to assist persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Reaction to 100-Day Plan

¶4. (SBU) Rosalinda Hernandez, member of the Board of Directors of the NGO feminist group "La Cuerda" (The Cord) and editor of its newspaper, told poloff that the 19 demands represent the maturing of the priorities of women's groups since the signing of the Peace Accords. She noted that while her organization does not view the First Lady as a feminist, it regards her as someone with good will who will champion their demands. With Torres agreeing to take on their agenda,

Hernandez expressed optimism about advancing the women's agenda during the Colom administration. She asserted that women's groups could not have had the open, receptive discussions with previous First Ladies that they have had with Torres. Cecilia Alvarez, consultant for NGO "Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres" (Guatemalan Group of Women), valued, in particular, Torres' proposed monthly meetings with women's organizations. She noted that Torres agreed to meet with women's groups on June 16, the day the 100-day plan lapses, to discuss progress, but welcomed regular meetings prior to that date, which Alvarez interpreted as a demonstration of good will.

¶5. (SBU) Presidential Secretariat for Women (SEPREM) Gabriela Nunez was generally supportive of the plan. She said that while SEPREM does not support revision of the existing national policy on women, which it drafted last year in consultation with several women's groups and reached consensus, it would seek to improve its implementation. Qconsensus, it would seek to improve its implementation. Nunez agreed on the need to strengthen communication between SEPREM and women's groups. However, she noted that the coalition of 18 local women's groups that presented the demands lacked clear understanding of the division of roles and limits on power among the Legislative, Executive, and civil society.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Despite Guatemala's numerous challenges, women's groups seem optimistic about advancing their agenda with the support of the First Lady. In a country with a culture of violence, where women have traditionally been marginalized and many domestically abused, Torres' public support and voice for the women's agenda promise to provide the necessary momentum to promote gender equality and elevate the role of women in society.

Derham